

Lake County News Sun Editorial, June 18, 2008

For those of us who decry violence in our communities, losing the federal ban on assault weapons was a blow to law enforcement. Now, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, has introduced legislation in Congress to restore the ban that expired in 2004. The fact is that military-style assault weapons are designed to kill as many people as possible in rapid-fire succession. One hardly needs an AK-47 and a magazine containing as many as 40 rounds to go duck hunting in the fall on the Chain O'Lakes.

Most Americans and numerous law enforcement organizations support the ban, which had been in effect for 10 years. Waukegan Police Chief Bill Biang endorses the measure. Just two weeks ago, Waukegan police were drawn into a standoff with a suspect, who later committed suicide, who had at least one assault weapon in his possession. Currently, there are an estimated 1.5 million privately owned assault weapons in the U.S.

Chicago police argue assault weapons are being used to militarize street gangs. One study suggests automatic weapons like AK-47s are used in 20 percent of murders of law enforcement officers. Illinois does not have a statewide assault weapons ban or large magazine restriction, which in itself is a travesty.

It is not only law enforcement groups which back the ban. Trauma-care physicians who treat the victims of such weapons feel the same way. They and many others can make the common-sense distinction between owning regular firearms and the folly of legalizing weapons whose primary function is to kill and maim indiscriminately.

It is estimated that while the United States had the ban, there was a 66 percent drop in the number of assault weapons used in violent crimes. Kirk's legislation would make it illegal to manufacture, transfer or possess a semiautomatic assault weapon or high-capacity magazines.

Assault weapons go beyond our right to bear arms. Reinstating the ban deserves bipartisan support.